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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000497

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: GOM PROPOSES HIGH LEVEL DELEGATION TO BRIEF
WASHINGTON ON WESTERN SAHARA AUTONOMY PROPOSALS

REF: RABAT 461

Classified By: DCM Wayne J. Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs Taieb Fassi Fihri told Ambassador Riley March 20 that he and Moroccan Amb. to the UN (and until recently Interior Minister) Moustapha Sahel proposed to travel to Washington this week or early next to brief U.S. officials informally on King Mohammed,s autonomy proposal for the Western Sahara, other initiatives the King plans to take regarding the Western Sahara (including greater democratization, "generational change" and identifying human resources for the future), how Morocco sees the process leading toward autonomy moving forward, and how Algeria,s position is impacting the process. Fassi Fihri intends to seek informal reaction from the U.S. to Morocco,s proposals, and hopes to have a common approach with the U.S. toward the UNSC consultation and MINURSO renewal in late April. Fassi Fihri and Sahel would like to call on A/S Welch, Deputy Secretary Zoellick, and the NSC. Ambassador Riley emphasized that Washington would be interested in a serious autonomy proposal, and that focusing on perceived Algerian objectives would diminish the impact of Moroccan proposals. End summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Riley met with Minister-Delegate for Foreign Affairs Taieb Fassi Fihri on March 20 at Fassi Fihri,s request. Morocco,s Ambassador to the UN Moustapha Sahel, until recently Minister of Interior, was present for the meeting, and Royal Advisor Mohamed Moatassim arrived during the course of the meeting, apparently for separate discussions with Fassi Fihri and Sahel concerning the rollout of Morocco,s autonomy proposal for the Western Sahara. The DCM accompanied the Ambassador. The Western Sahara discussion immediately followed a meeting with Fassi Fihri and Minister of Communications Benabdallah concerning MEPI support for Moroccan media (septel).

¶3. (C) The meeting began with Fassi Fihri and Sahel present. Fassi Fihri said that he wanted to discuss both King Mohammed,s visit to Laayoune, the consultations the GOM has held with political parties and other representatives of the local population on the Western Sahara, and the vision of the "team," which includes Fassi Fihri, Sahel, the King,s confidante and deputy interior minister Fouad Ali Himma, members of the royal cabinet, and others.

¶4. (C) Fassi Fihri said that Sahel had returned from New York after an initial round of consultations at the request

of King Mohammed VI. He pointed out that the UN Security Council had reflected for two years - since James Baker's resignation as Personal Envoy of the Secretary General - about how to reach a political solution. Morocco had now developed its proposals, and the King had requested that Sahel and Fassi Fihri travel to Washington to brief the State Department and NSC on the results of Morocco's own reflection and the King's vision for the Western Sahara. He said that the King's commitment to autonomy is clear, but he wanted to discuss in Washington how the process to achieve autonomy can be a "100 percent success" based upon consultation with Morocco's political parties.

15. (C) Fassi Fihri pointed out that the King had insisted on consultation with the local population and locally elected officials, in addition to the political parties, in formulating Morocco's autonomy proposal. It was important now for Morocco to work closely with the U.S. and others in the run-up to Security Council consideration of the Western Sahara and MINURSO mandate renewal at the end of April. He hoped Morocco could have a common goal with the U.S. concerning the UNSC resolution. He said that the King will undertake various initiatives during his visit to the Western Sahara this week related to democratization, "generational change," and identifying human resources for the future.

16. (C) The GOM intends to share its proposals informally in only two capitals (Washington and Paris) and possibly a third (London), Fassi Fihri said. The GOM hopes for a confidential consultation in order to obtain Washington's

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opinion on its proposals, which Fassi Fihri and Sahel would relay to the King. Fassi Fihri said that he and Sahel would also like to share with Washington confidential information

about Algeria's position, and share the GOM's analysis of Algeria's role. (Comment: Fassi Fihri was joined at this stage of the meeting by Moatassim arriving from the palace, and Fassi Fihri's comments appeared to become more circumspect. End comment.) Fassi Fihri observed that the consultations held recently with political parties had been helpful. The (Islamic) Party for Justice and Development (PJD), for instance, had become more enthusiastic about autonomy following their conference on the subject (reftel), and the position of the National Democratic Party (PND) had also become more positive.

17. (C) Ambassador Riley replied that the U.S. understands Morocco's view that the process leading to autonomy should be a proposal by Morocco leading to a negotiation, and that Morocco's opening proposal will not necessarily represent its bottom line. Nevertheless, the Ambassador said, Washington interlocutors will be much more interested in hearing about a serious and positive autonomy proposal than about Morocco's views of Algerian objectives. Focusing on perceived Algerian objectives would diminish the impact of the presentation in Washington.

18. (C) Fassi Fihri emphasized that the GOM has a serious and positive dialogue with Algeria via Algeria's Ambassador to Morocco. He said Morocco must feed "all the inputs into our program, but our demarche is positive." The main issue, Fassi Fihri said, is autonomy, in which the King is totally involved and to which he is totally committed. Fassi Fihri said that the visit to Washington would be in the vein of friendly consultations. The DCM observed that it would be much easier for U.S. officials to react to the GOM presentation if information on Morocco's proposals is provided in advance. Fassi Fihri said that the presentation needed to be a dialogue. He recognized that it would not be possible for his counterparts to react immediately, but if necessary he and Sahel could remain in Washington for several days to allow U.S. officials time to digest their presentation and provide feedback.

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Riley